



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DECISION RECORD

Largemouth bass stocking in East Fork Reservoir

Water Name: East Fork Reservoir **Water Code:** 16-4950
County: Fergus County **Legal Description:** T14N R19E S14

Proposed Action: Stock largemouth bass in East Fork Reservoir

Description of Public Notification/Review Process: The Environmental Assessment (EA) was placed on the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks web site on December 5, 2006. The comment period ended January 12, 2007. A press release was distributed regarding the proposed stocking plan. The local Walleye Unlimited Chapter and Trout Unlimited members were contacted. The initial EA did not indicate that a warmwater fish stamp would be required once largemouth bass were introduced. The EA was amended to address that change and public comment re-opened from February 5, 2007 – March 16, 2007.

Summary of Public Comments: Twelve written comments regarding the project were received during the initial review period. Eight comments, including one with seven different signatures, were strongly in favor of the introduction. Some comments also expressed the desire for additional species such as walleye in East Fork Reservoir. There were also several verbal comments in support of the project. One letter was against the proposal because the species is not native to the area and could “contaminate” the Big Spring trout fishery. Three comments received did not oppose the introduction but did not think largemouth bass were the best option. These letters requested smallmouth bass, crappie, walleye or tiger muskie as the introduced species. One requested a 24-inch size limit for northern pike in East Fork. Written comments from three additional people and one phone call were received during the later comment period. Three of the later comments were in full support of the project. The third comment felt a size limit on northern pike or introduction of tiger muskie would be a better option.

Response to Public Comment: The EA determined that largemouth bass would not do well in Big Spring Creek due to flow and water temperature so it seems unlikely that they would “contaminate” that fishery. Largemouth bass were previously stocked in the Big Spring Creek basin at Lower Carter Pond and did not appear to cause any problems.

Smallmouth bass and walleye were also evaluated in the EA and determined to be not suitable for stocking in East Fork Reservoir due to the possibility of becoming established in Big Spring Creek (smallmouth bass) and due to the likelihood of not doing well in the reservoir due to the low water retention time in the reservoir (walleye). Introduced walleye also have the potential to hybridize with native sauger,

a species of concern, in the Judith and Missouri Rivers. Tiger muskie was not evaluated because this hybrid between northern pike and muskie is similar (but larger) than northern pike. Crappie are commonly prone to stunting in small reservoirs. Dense populations of small crappies could easily become a problem in East Fork since studies have found that northern pike would likely prey on perch instead of crappie. The northern pike currently in the reservoir are of adequate size to eat most of the yellow perch in the reservoir, so size limits are not being considered at this time.

Recommendation: Stock largemouth bass as described in the proposed alternative for the EA.

Gary Bertellotti
Regional Supervisor

Date